

Preventing and coping with (cyber)bullying: participatory mapping towards self-regulatory strategies

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the first step of a Participatory Design project on combating (cyber)bullying is presented. The goal of the project is to provide teachers with a (digital) toolkit to facilitate 9- to 10-year olds to become more self-regulatory as a class group in preventing and coping with traditional bullying as well as cyberbullying. In a series of mapping sessions with experts and teachers using the MAP-it tool, we have identified a set of preconditions for effectively combating (cyber)bullying and suggestions for how these preconditions can be created. The presented results should be seen as a metaphorical map, indicating roads, dangers and opportunities in the design process of the toolkit. Since children are important stakeholders as well, they will be actively involved as design partners in the next steps of the project.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.5.2 User Interfaces, Methodology, User-centered design

Author Keywords

Participatory Design; MAP-it; Children; Cyberbullying; Bullying; Empowerment; Self-regulatory strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Parallel to the rise of online and mobile media, cyberbullying has become a well-known phenomenon, expanding and intensifying bullying behaviour beyond its traditional borders. Although some anti-bullying programs have been developed over the past decades that, to a certain degree, try to empower children in combating (cyber)bullying (e.g. No Blame [15], Shared Concern [12], KiVa, [7][16] etc.), we like to go a step further. Not only do we aim at strengthening children's participation in both intervention and prevention strategies, our focus will be on both traditional as well as cyberbullying.

The research goal is to provide teachers with a (digital) toolkit to facilitate children to become more self-regulatory in preventing and coping with (cyber)bullying. As a first step, together with experts and teachers, we have identified a set of preconditions for this bottom-up oriented approach. These preconditions will

subsequently be used as a starting point or a metaphorical roadmap guiding us throughout the design process of the toolkit. In this paper, we will present these preconditions and suggestions on how they can be created.

2. RELATED WORK

Defined as the systematic abuse of power in interpersonal relations, bullying is still a widespread problem in schools throughout the world [18]. Across Europe, 19 per cent of 9- to 16-year-olds report having been bullied and 12 per cent report having bullied someone else [10]. When it comes to online or cyberbullying, 6 per cent report having been victimised online and 3 per cent confess to having bullied others online [9].

With the emergence of online or cyberbullying, there are now not only more children and youngsters involved in bullying, but the problem has also intensified, as it has become almost impossible for some victims to escape their bullies. Besides being victimised offline, such as in and around school, they are increasingly victimised online as well, at any time and wherever they might be [1][20].

Research on bullying used to focus primarily on the relation between perpetrator(s) and victim. Olweus [11], for example, described bullying as a repeated, imbalanced (with regard to power) and negative act that occurs between a bully and a victim. Nevertheless it has been emphasized that bullying is far and foremost a group process in which bystanders have an effect on the persistence of the bullying and on the adjustment of the victims [2][8]. Victims and bullies are embedded in subgroups where their peers support them. These subgroups can often be found in existing social contexts such as the school and more particular the classroom. Therefore, group processes in a class group are important in explaining and understanding bullying, not only for offline but also for online bullying [6].

When it comes to preventing and tackling bullying, many anti-bullying programs have been developed over the past decades and currently there are a wide variety of practices being employed in schools [14]. Punitive or disciplinary approaches, in which (possible) perpetrators get punished in order to solve the problem, are increasingly discredited. Although such measures may appear to stop the behaviour initially, they often result in the bullying getting worse and going underground. Also, they do not change the behaviours and attitudes of those involved in bullying [14]. By contrast, other methods such as the Support Group Method formerly known as the No Blame Method [15] the Method of Shared Concern [12] and the KiVa anti-bullying program [7][16] can bring about more profound and enduring change. These methods do not seek to impose a solution but, to a certain degree,

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try to empower children involved in bullying to negotiate a solution. Moreover, these methods acknowledge that bullying is often a group process in which responsibility for the bullying behaviour may be diffuse [4] [13].

We believe that empowering children, victims, perpetrators as well as bystanders, in combating bullying is the key to enduring attitude and behaviour change towards bullying. Although the earlier mentioned anti-bullying programs try to empower students to a certain degree, we want to go a step further. Our aim is to not only strengthen children's participation in reactive strategies when bullying occurs, but also in proactive strategies to prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

Moreover, whereas most methods tend to focus on either traditional or cyberbullying, we are especially interested in preventing and intervening in cases of bullying where online and offline worlds collide. Since traditional as well as cyberbullying are strongly connected to the context of the school and in particular to the classroom [21] our focus will thereby be on the class as a social group.

In sum, we will investigate how and by which (digital) tools teachers can facilitate children to become more self-regulatory as a class group in preventing and tackling (cyber)bullying. As a first step, we have identified preconditions for this bottom-up oriented approach, and we came to understand how we can address these preconditions successfully.

3. METHOD

To gain further insight in existing strategies to combat (cyber)bullying as well as to identify preconditions for self-regulatory and bottom-up oriented approaches, we invited experts as well as teachers for a series of mapping sessions. Mapping is a technique to visually outline ideas and the relations among them. For this purpose we used a hands-on tool for participatory cartography and conversation known as MAP-it [5]. MAP-it consists of a large mapping background and an open and extendible set of icons that allows participants to make their thoughts explicit in a visual way, in the form of a map. The visual character of mapping allows participants from different backgrounds to discuss projects on equal grounds [5], and therefore fits within the broader Participatory Design approach used for this project (see Figure 1). In Participatory Design, users and other stakeholders participate in the design process to ensure that the resulting designs fit the way people will actually use the product in their own lives [17][19].

3.1 MAP-it session 1

The goal of the first MAP-it session was to gain further insight in existing strategies to prevent (cyber)bullying, and cope with it in a class context. Two sessions were held. One with a group of seven experts in the field (e.g. employees of Childfocus, the national centre for missing and exploited children; the Flemish network 'Take Sides Against Bullying', etc.) and one with a group of five primary school teachers. Each session lasted about three hours and one researcher facilitated both sessions.

As a starting point, we used a fictitious (cyber)bullying scenario in which multiple 9- to 10-year-olds of the same class were involved, either as victim, perpetrator or bystander. Each group was invited to map how a teacher could address the bullying problem and prevent it from happening in the future. The researcher guided the group through several well-timed stages (i.e. mapping values, goals, actors, actions and tools), where each stage asked for a specific set of sticker icons. There were several

types of icons. Some were to inspire, others were to label, to structure, to link or to construct. However, participants could also draw or write directly on the background sheet to visualize ideas and thoughts.



Figure 1. MAP-it session with experts and teachers

When a group finished its map, we asked to “lock” the most important parts on their map by placing a sticker of a padlock next to it. The metaphor of locking was used as a means for convergence. Next, the participants were invited to rethink their map as critically as possible and to identify possible risks. We ended up with an open and lively discussion on the results.

3.2 MAP-it session 2

The goal of the second MAP-it session was to identify preconditions for self-regulatory and bottom-up oriented approaches in combating (cyber)bullying in a class context. Two groups of five participants each, both including teachers as well as experts, participated in the session. The groups were asked to map how teachers could facilitate children aged 9 to 10 to become more self-regulatory as a class group in preventing and coping with (cyber)bullying. The session took about three hours and was led by two facilitators, one for each group.

Similar to the previous MAP-it sessions, a researcher guided the group through several well-timed stages and for each stage specific stickers sets were used. When a group finished its map, the most important parts were locked and a presenter was chosen to present the map (i.e. the background sheet on which they visualised their ideas and thoughts) to the other group.

After the presentations, the participants of the other group were asked to highlight their favourite parts on the map with ‘thumbs up’ and ‘heart’ stickers, and to identify possible risks and dangers with ‘warning triangles’ and ‘bomb’ stickers. This way, the

mapping's structure not only encouraged to share positive experiences, but also led to critique and debate.

3.3 Analysis

All MAP-it sessions were recorded on video and were fully transcribed for analysis. Next, each session was summarized while maintaining the same sequence of mapping categories (i.e. values, goals, actors, actions, tools, locks, opportunities and risks), resulting in a clear datasheet per session. After this first data reduction, there was still a lot of redundant information left in and across datasheets. To filter out this redundancy, all four data sheets were put together and the sequence of mapping categories was left behind. To structure and further reduce the data, we sorted the data based on their natural relationships (i.e. affinity diagram mapping), resulting in a set of preconditions. These results will be presented briefly in the next section.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, it was stressed repeatedly that a safe group with no ongoing bullying problems should be the starting point to implement a bottom-up oriented approach towards (cyber)bullying. The prevention pyramid, a framework for structuring prevention in school, was often referred to in this context [3]. According to this model, prevention can and should be structured on different levels ranging from the broad societal context to prevention measures targeted at very specific problems.

What happens at the first level, the broad societal context, is hard to grasp for schools. Teachers should start at the second level of the prevention pyramid (i.e. the social school climate) to facilitate children in becoming more self-regulatory in combating (cyber)bullying. On this level, emphasis is put on creating a general positive atmosphere. This includes presenting a nuanced image of social media and the internet instead of focusing solely on potential risks.

The next level, general prevention, is about making children emotionally literate by enhancing empathy, developing social skills and making them more resilient. Only at the top levels of the pyramid (i.e. specific prevention and problem solving) off- and online bullying come into play explicitly. Examples of specific prevention measures are teaching children how to manage privacy settings online and role-playing games to teach children how to react to bullying behaviour either as a bystander or as a victim. Problem solving, the top level, is about curating acute (cyber)bullying problems.

Since the bottom levels contribute to the quality of the other levels in the prevention pyramid and because bullying behaviour should be prevented from happening in the first place, the toolkit should go beyond (cyber)bullying alone. It was recommended regularly to develop a broad-spectrum toolkit targeting the different levels of the prevention pyramid. Furthermore, the toolkit should be integrated in a multi-layered, whole school approach, targeting the individual, class and school level as well as communication with parents throughout the trajectory.

A tool that should definitely be included in the toolkit according to the participants is a 'social questionnaire' to map group dynamics and to monitor how everyone feels in the group. This way, it will be much easier to detect tensions within the group and to prevent them from growing into acute (bullying) problems. Also needed are tools to build 'symmetrical trust' (i.e. trust in both directions) between teachers and their students, allowing teachers to gain more insight in what happens beneath the surface of the group, offline as well as online. Since bullying is a group

process in which bystanders have an effect on the persistence of bullying, the toolkit should further facilitate children to make their own engagements about how they can improve the class atmosphere (i.e. broad prevention) and how they can help victims when bullying nevertheless occurs (i.e. intervention or problem solving). Peer sensitizing, in which some children, most likely the popular ones, take the lead in sensitizing other children about safe internet use and what they can do about (cyber)bullying, was also mentioned a few times.

Importantly, a broad-spectrum toolkit should not be mistaken for a one-size-fits-all approach. The tools should be open and adaptable, and designed for structural, long-term use. For profound and enduring change to take place, it is furthermore important for the toolkit to be built upon a 'no blame' philosophy. In sum, a shift in the whole school culture may be needed for a bottom-up approach towards (cyber)bullying to succeed.

5. FUTURE WORK AND CONCLUSIONS

The goal of our research is to provide teachers with a (digital) toolkit to facilitate 9- to 10-year olds to become more self-regulatory as a group in combating traditional as well as cyberbullying. In a series of MAP-it sessions [5], experts and teachers have been involved to identify and to understand the preconditions for such a bottom-up oriented strategy. This was in line with the Participatory Design approach at the core of this project.

The results presented in this paper should be seen as a metaphorical map, indicating roads, dangers and opportunities to the traveller, not as a mere route prescribing a fixed solution. However, these preconditions were based on the opinions of adults only. Since children are important stakeholders in the design process of the toolkit as well, they should not be overlooked. In the next phases of our research, we will actively involve the children (9 to 10-year-olds) themselves. Therefore, specifically designed Participatory Design methods will be needed [22]. Although beyond the scope of this particular project, future work will also need to extend the current target group to other age groups, including e.g. teenagers.

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